

THE KITCHEN WIDOW

Come for the food, stay for the inspiration.

Tembi Locke, The Kitchen Widow/ BIO



Tembi Locke is an actor, mom, writer, artist, chef's wife and now a young widow. She's passionate about two things: how we come together to help each other through moments of crisis and transition AND savoring the flavors, food, and kitchen wisdom from her favorite island in a dazzling sea, Sicily.

In 2015 she created [The Kitchen Widow](#), an inspirational online platform that reclaims the lost art of comfort to support those confronting illness and loss. By focusing on what matters most: nourishing the body, heart and soul, The Kitchen Widow shares recipes, resources and inspiration to make the journey through illness and grief more bearable and, essentially, more human.

Since launching The Kitchen Widow, Tembi's delivered a [TEDx](#) talk on loss and love, spoken on behalf of caregivers alongside Kathy Bates, and formed numerous collaborations to transform the way America handles grief and illness. She comes by her wisdom honestly.



At 31, she had two major roles. On-screen, she worked as a TV actor and, off-screen, she was wife to Saro, a brilliant, Sicilian-born chef. It was an ideal life for the girl who had always dreamed of a career in the arts and who begged for the last bite at the end of a delicious meal. Together, they had carved out a life suited to feed both their creative souls.

When Saro was diagnosed with leiomyosarcoma, a rare, life threatening bone cancer, the floor fell out from underneath their idyllic life and a new path appeared before them. Saro's career as a professional chef was over in a flash. For Tembi, the bright lights of Hollywood went momentarily into soft focus. "What became immediately clear was the realization that I was about to help the human being I loved most in the world fight the battle of his life. In the course of a single afternoon, I took on a role familiar to millions of Americans, I became a primary caregiver," she explains.

They did what many people do when cancer hits, they prepared to fight the good fight. Initially, they hoped that diet, meditation, love, and laughter could deliver them from tragedy. "If we did all the "right" things, we'd find our way into a lifetime of tomorrows. Cancer would be a part of our narrative, but it wouldn't define it," Tembi says.



They were partially right. Love and laughter are essential ingredients to a life under assault. Eating strategically makes significant differences. With grace, luck, dedicated doctors, brilliant nurses and practitioners, numerous clinical trials, personal and emotional tenacity, Saro and Tembi shared ten miraculous years together. "Looking back," she says, "I can see that we had that time to learn about deep, soulful living in times of crisis."

Today, Tembi works to deliver that message through The Kitchen Widow while raising her daughter and continuing her work as an actor in film and television with roles in SHOOTER, THE MAGICIANS, DUMB AND DUMBER TO, NCIS, THE MENTALIST, CASTLE, BONES, FRIENDS, EUREKA, and COLLUSIONS.

<http://www.thekitchenwidow.com>



About The Kitchen Widow

The Kitchen Widow is a modern take on the age-old kitchen table conversation – an inspirational online platform dedicated to raising awareness about how to can support each other through times of illness and grief. Here, Tembi Locke guides her community through reclaiming the lost art of comforting the soul with delicious food.

Using the tools she learned at the side of her chef husband, Tembi chops, tastes and transforms the raw ingredients of loss and gratitude into something generous and sustaining. The Kitchen Widow features:

Recipes

Traditional Sicilian recipes with gorgeous photography woo the palate and the eye. The sheer visceral pleasure of reading the ingredient lists and the directions while viewing the stunning images make the act of actually making the recipes a beautiful extra, not a mandatory task.

Inspiration

With her trademark candor and accessibility, Tembi shares her own story as she lives it. Her lessons learned in caring for her husband and the wisdom she finds as she moves forward in life with her daughter are all on offer with a warm invitation to join her in the process of comforting ourselves and one another in times of illness and grief.

Webisodes

The web series discusses often difficult topics such as children and grief and remembering loved ones within the framework of the familiar and comforting kitchen table conversation. Yes, make the olive oil infusion or watch Tembi transform fresh citrus into limoncello, but drink in more than words and images. Drink in the compassion, understanding and sense that you are welcome: there is room for everyone at this table.

Resources

Rich with practical resources for those going through illness, caregivers, and those trying to support caregivers, The Kitchen Widow gently educates all of us on how to better care for one another.

Comfort

The Kitchen Widow offers a beautiful, inspiring space for those who have been touched by profound loss, walked the path of caregiving, or simply asked themselves, “What do I do? What do I say?” Here, people from all phases of life find advice and inspiration.

The Kitchen Widow FAQ/A Conversation with Tembi Locke

<http://www.thekitchenwidow.com>

Q: What is a Kitchen Widow?

In the restaurant business, a chef's wife is known as a "kitchen widow" because their partners are lost to the demands of the restaurant business. For more than a decade, I was one such wife. When my chef husband died, the meaning moved from metaphor to stark reality. Launching The Kitchen Widow allowed me to use this common professional term and give it a whole new meaning.

Q: Why use food as the prism through which to bring awareness to caregiving, grief, healing?

Food is the sustenance of the human experience. When illness or grief are seated at table of life, food is given to nourish, sustain and comfort. We starve a fever, we feed a cold. When death happens, we offer gifts of food to the grieving. The Kitchen Widow uses our established rituals of gathering and eating to provide a space that encourages community awareness and action when we need it most.

I want us to use food for all those obvious reasons - to nourish, to heal, to gather. But I also want us to use our time with food, in the preparation and the sharing, to investigate the assumptions that we can't handle "big issues" like illness and death in a way that is beautiful and enriching. We can. I know because I have lived it. I used the beauty of food to spark my renewal after the loss of my husband. Food is an endless source of inspiration and connection. It's my canvas to talk about healing one another emotionally through social interaction and deep connection.

Q: What role does the table play? Why is it such a powerful metaphor?

The table is this physical and social space where we gather - daily. Around the table we confront life's pains and joys, often in the company of others. We break bread to nourish our bodies, minds and souls. The table also holds our stories. And when life is challenging, the kitchen table is often where we turn when we need to slow down and re-connect.

For me personally, it was the heart center of life with my chef. When he died, the kitchen table was one of the most intimate reminders of his absence - his empty seat spoke volumes. I spent a lot of time trying to get myself "back to the table" to recapture the joy and life-affirming feelings we created there.

Today, I see an opportunity to leverage the kitchen table to advance a cultural maturation around how we face loss and caregiving. And we can do that over delicious food.

Q: Why do you focus on Sicilian food?

It is the home cooking I know best. For twenty years, regional Sicilian (and food from the "other" region, a little place called Tuscany) is what we cooked at home. Sicily because it is the birthplace of the chef I loved. Tuscany because it is birthplace of the love we shared.

Sicily is also where I have turned in my grief. Ancient cultures know how to care for the grieving. Practically speaking, Sicilian cooking relies on fresh, simple ingredients. Love that! Spiritually, it owes its complexities to the cuisines of North Africa, Spain, Greece and influences from across the Mediterranean. So in that way, every time I eat it I feel I have taken a journey.

Ultimately, Sicilian food is a cuisine you can pour your heart into. And it lends itself to the sensibilities of the person preparing it. For someone like me who knows what tastes good, but doesn't have the culinary prowess to "turn it out" like a chef, it is food I can prepare with ease.

Q: How have you survived losing your husband?

“It takes a village” never has more resonance than when illness strikes. How exactly did I manage being sole income earner, mother, patient advocate, sometimes nurse, and household manager. How did I spend nights at a hospital bedside and days on-set? I have many answers to those questions. However, the ONE answer I always give is that the journey was made bearable by the love and support of those who rallied around us. A village of people appeared along the path with a helping hand – family, friends, and even strangers. They understood that supporting the caregiver is sometimes the best way you can support the patient.

Long-term caregiving means to witness, assist and love someone through a difficult journey. To do that I had to learn how to build a network of friends and family who could go the distance. I had to learn how to ask those people for help. I had to learn to be honest about my own fears, vulnerability, my burnout and even resentment. (Yes, caregivers have all that.)

Often long-term caregiving ends in loss. Grief doesn’t move in a straight line. Each person’s grief journey will be unique to their life experience, personality and relationship to the person who has passed away.

Q: What do you hope to accomplish with The Kitchen Widow?

The Kitchen Widow started as a passion project, a way for me to move forward and give back. It has become so much more than that. I’m on a quiet mission to transform the way we approach illness and greiving and I’m doing it with love, laughter, and great food!

We’re developing some amazing partnerships and really expanding our reach. There are 65.7 million Americans (or 29 percent of the adult U.S. adult population involving 31 percent of all U.S. households) serving as family caregivers. Every one of these people need support and we’re here to help provide it in the form of inspiration and advice as we get real about what’s important in times of illness and grief.

Q: How can people get involved and share The Kitchen Widow’s inspiration with those confronting illness and loss?

Getting involved is easy. Start by visiting our website www.TheKitchenWidow.com and take a look around. You’ll find action steps for caregivers, for those who are grieving and for the friends and family around those folks. You can share our videos and join our Facebook community. Start by subscribing and spreading the word. Then watch for our yearly national call to action and the release of my book.

Q: Where I can see more of The Kitchen Widow?

Watch my [TEDx talk](#) online and follow me on social media. You’ll be able to see which national support organizations I’m partnering with to share the mission of The Kitchen Widow. We have new episodes in production for the website you can learn about by subscribing and you can always contact us to schedule an interview or book me to speak at your event.

